



PRESS RELEASE

New Study Reveals Why Boys Are Underachieving in School

Maine Boys Network asks more than 540 Maine boys about their perspectives on gender and learning

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October 17, 2008: The Maine Boys Network released new findings from a year-long research project at a statewide conference at Bates College today. The preliminary report—*The Gender Divide in Academic Engagement: Perspectives from Maine Boys and Young Men*—details findings from 72 focus groups conducted in elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and colleges across Maine in 2007–2008. More than 540 boys and young men took part in the study, which explored their feelings and opinions on gender and schooling, as well as the relationships, experiences, and strategies that effectively engage them in the classroom and foster a love of learning. The report represents one of the first comprehensive investigations of the growing gender divide in academic engagement and achievement from the perspective of male students.

The Maine Boys Network Conference—which featured workshops on successful Maine-based school strategies for teaching boys and a panel of boys and educators responding to the report’s findings—attracted educators, policy makers, and parents from every corner of Maine. The report adds a vital missing piece to the national and international debate about why boys are falling behind academically: the voices and experiences of boys themselves. “The Boys’ voices are frank, funny, and very serious about what needs to change in school,” says Dr. Georgia Nigro, one of the Maine Boys Network researchers and Professor of Psychology at Bates College.

The Maine Boys Network is a partnership between Bates College, Bowdoin College, Boys to Men, Bridgton Academy, Colby College, the Great Schools Partnership, the Mitchell Institute, Portland Public Schools, Unity College, and the University of Maine at Farmington. As a consortium of policy analysts, educators, writers, researchers, and youth-serving professionals, the Network is committed to promoting the health and successful development of all boys from

pre-adolescence through young adulthood by supporting their success in academic settings. Its primary goal is to reverse an ominous cultural trend—the increasing underachievement and disengagement of boys.

A quick look at the data:

- 36% of boys who graduate from high school fail to go on to any form of higher learning. And an estimated 35% of boys never even reach that threshold—they drop out of high school.
- Boys get the majority of D's and F's in most schools—in some, as high as 70%.
- According to the U.S. Department of Education, our sons are an average of a year to a year and a half behind girls in reading and writing skills. (Girls are only slightly behind boys in math and science; this gap has been almost closed in the last 20 years.)
- Young men now make up less than 44% of our college population.
- According to a University of Michigan study, the number of boys who said they did not like school rose 71% between 1980 and 2001.

Websites:

Boys to Men: www.boystomen.info

Maine Boys Network Conference at Bates: www.boysconference.org

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